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ABSTRACT

One of the big problems in migrant education is the need to determine quickly the educational level of the student so that his learning progress can continue as he moves from one school to another. Normative-referenced tests provide little help for the teacher. The author describes a new type of test (the criterion-referenced test), soon to be marketed commercially, which could aid the teacher in minimizing lost teaching time by easily identifying the appropriate instructional level in reading and mathematics for each student. (Author/LS)

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Criterion-referenced Tests--

A New Promise for Old Problems in Migrant Education

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For teachers who work with migrant students, many of the challenges and problems found in any classroom are multiplied and intensified because of several factors. One of the greatest factors of all is the short period of time which teachers of migrant pupils have to become acquainted with the student and to program the level of instruction suited to his present level of accomplishment.

One effort of recent development has been the initiation of newer and faster methods of retrieval of migrant student records, utilizing a national data bank and retrieval by means of the teletype. A vast improvement over past methods of receiving migrant student records by mail, it still fails to provide teachers with explicit information as to which specific skills a student possesses.

Too often, many skills in such areas as reading and mathematics are re-taught to students who have already mastered these skills because the teacher has inadequate knowledge of the mastery level of students.

To teach migrant children skills they already possess is both a source of frustration and a waste of time. And remember, one of the greatest deficits in migrant education is insufficient instructional time in the classroom! Migrant students spend less hours in a classroom during the year than any other disadvantaged group.

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The challenge then, is to maximize the available time the teacher has to work with the migrant student moving him from the level of competence at which he arrives to a higher one by the time he leaves. This is more than a challenge--it's a necessity, if migrant youngsters are to break the chains of ignorance and poverty, which bind them to a future not unlike that of their parents because the schools failed to educate them.

A recent development in education which has great promise for overcoming problems of lack of knowledge of student mastery and the shortage of time is the use of criterion-referenced tests. Criterion-referenced tests in reading and mathematics should be used in migrant education programs.

For years we have used norm-referenced tests which gave us grade equivalent scores, percentile scores, or stanine scores, reflecting where a student stood in relationship to others--his peer group, a reference group, or some sampled standardization group. While these tests are useful, they fail to give the teacher the degree of mastery of certain skills in reading or arithmetic in an absolute sense. Normative-referenced test scores fail miserably as a tool to aid the teacher in the educational placement of a migrant student who has traveled much, moved often, and as a result has uneven development in the basic skills area.

You're probably wondering by now "Just what is a criterion-referenced test?" Simply stated, a criterion-referenced test is one which contains a comprehensive inventory of skills in a particular domain or subject matter area, arranged in a hierarchy or taxonomical order which allows a student to demonstrate his mastery of the skills he has learned. A criterion-reference test, of course, should be relevant to classroom instruction. It should include the types of skills commonly taught in text

materials and in classrooms. For example, in the area of reading, specifically in reading readiness, skills such as matching shapes, tracing letters, understanding certain concepts as up, below, above, etc. are quite common to almost any basal reader series or kit form type of readers. These are examples of beginning reading skills which students must master in order to go on to more difficult reading tasks such as those needed for critical reading. Reading skills, as restating the sequence of events, identifying words which create mood, and analyzing devices of persuasion, all represent some of the highest levels of mastery in this discipline.

Dr. Marie Hackett has identified over 450 skills necessary for competence in reading and language for students from kindergarten to sixth grade. Glenn Roudabush and Donald Green have identified approximately 400 skills which cover 90 to 95 percent of the mathematics curriculum commonly taught in grades 4 through 8.

To my knowledge, six major publishers of testing materials are now in the process of developing criterion-referenced tests in reading and arithmetic. These tests should be available by late spring or early summer of this year.

Because the use of criterion-referenced tests enables the teacher to conduct a diagnostic evaluation of a student's mastery in areas as reading and arithmetic with greater precision than ever, a new day could be dawning in migrant education. The skills are arranged in hierarchy from simplest to most difficult so that assessments of performance skills can be done in a manner which identifies both pupil strengths and weaknesses.

With the use of criterion-referenced tests migrant students can be placed on a level of instruction by the teacher making the most of the

instructional time she has to educate these youngsters. A system for transferring knowledge of the skill level in reading or mathematics of migrant students to the next school of attendance could eliminate time which is not now put to the best use and result in greater and more rapid accumulation of needed basic skills. The teacher would not have to reappraise and reassess mastery of skills in reading or mathematics. She could continue on, developing the next skill level as identified in the hierarchy of skills.

Both teachers and administrators in migrant education programs should be looking forward to the availability of criterion-referenced tests. Their potential for increasing the educational level of the migrant youngster should not be overlooked. For too long migrant youngsters have been denied the kind of education which allows them a greater and deserving share in the prosperity of America. It is our opportunity and responsibility to educate these students. Let's make the most of it!

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One of the big problems in migrant education is the need to quickly determine the educational level of the student and continue his learning progress as he moves from one school to another. Normative referenced tests provide little help for the teacher. The author describes a new type of test, soon to be marketed commercially which could aid the teacher in minimizing lost teaching time by easily identifying the appropriate instructional level in reading and mathematics for each student.